

EUROBAROMETER 62

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNITED KINGDOM

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Representation in the UK

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This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation in the United Kingdom.

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Introduction/timing/poll size

This executive summary looks at UK citizens' views about various aspects of the European Union and compares them with typical attitudes held across the Union (EU25 averages) and also highlights major differences with other individual member states.

Views are assessed across the European Union and results are based on both a country-by-country view and a country-specific socio-demographic analysis of the UK that attempts to highlight both the similarities and differences by such varied factors as age, education, occupation, etc.

The main data making up this report were gathered in October 2004 and are part of wave 62 of the Standard Eurobarometer. The UK sample comprised 1,310 persons, 629 of whom were male and 681 female. 97% of those polled were British.

Three major highlights

From the large amount of data making up EB62, three particularly significant points emerge from the UK statistics.

These relate to:

1. *The level of knowledge that UK citizens have of matters European, the general view they have of the Union and attitudes to media coverage.*

Eurobarometer reports in the past have consistently shown that the level of interest in the UK towards EU affairs was often the lowest in the Union and this earned the UK the nickname of the "don't know, don't care" capital of Europe.

This fundamental lack of knowledge and lack of interest combined to generate high levels of distrust in such EU institutions as the European Parliament and the European Commission.

However, as will be seen throughout this executive summary and the main report, there is substantial evidence that there has been a change of attitude in the UK.

There has been a sharp decline in the level of 'don't know' responses that used to characterise UK Eurobarometer reports and the level of awareness of EU institutions has changed substantially.

Evidence of this is shown by the marked increase in the number of UK citizens who have heard of the major European institutions.

There is also strong evidence that the EU is viewed notably more favourably by UK citizens than was the case six months previously. In the spring of 2004, 26% of the UK poll had a 'positive' image of the EU, while a noticeably larger proportion (37%) held a negative view.

In just six months, the figures have reversed so that the latest poll shows 32% of UK citizens having a positive image of the European Union compared with 31% taking the contrary position.

An indication of the relationship between the UK public and the media over coverage of EU matters was a key point of EB61, in the spring of 2004, when 42% of UK citizens felt that there was too little media coverage of the European Union.

In the autumn of 2004, this figure has now fallen to 34% which indicates that there is still an unsatisfied thirst for knowledge in this area.

Perhaps as importantly, while in the earlier survey in spring 2004, more than a quarter of the UK poll (27%) thought that such media coverage as there was presented a 'too negative' picture of EU affairs, this figure has now changed to 33% - the highest in the Union - which compares with just 14% as an EU25 average.

This would imply a thawing of attitude towards the European Union and a possible distaste of one-third of the UK public as to the way information on the European Union is presented by the media.

Fuelling this change of attitude may be the effect of a sharp fall in the 'don't know' statistics when it comes to analysing press presentation of the EU with figures falling from 28% to 19% in just six months.

There has also been a significant movement in the statistics relating to female citizens with particularly large declines in the 'don't know' figures that were a feature of previous reports.

The already established patterns whereby, in general terms, younger people and those with higher levels of education have noticeably better levels of knowledge on European affairs have continued in this survey.

2. The level of trust that UK citizens have for various institutions, including EU institutions and bodies and other more familiar organisations, notably the press and other institutions both UK and international.

When those polled in the UK were asked whether they trusted the EU, there was a notable change in the figures generated in the autumn 2004 poll compared with those in the spring of the same year.

Over just six months, the UK 'don't know' factor fell from 26% to 18% and a marked drop was also noted in the number of those who did not trust the EU from 55% to 47%.

These two factors combined to drive the proportion of UK citizens trusting the EU from less than one in five (19%) to more than one in three (35%).

Looking at trust factors on a broad basis, there is a highly visible difference in the trust factor accorded to the UK press and the European Commission. Only 14% of UK citizens say they trust the British press compared with 39% who trust the European Commission.

While trust levels for European institutions (despite recent marked growth in trust factors and a marked decrease in the 'don't know' quotient) still appear relatively low when compared with other Member States, when these data are examined in the context of the UK's trust levels generally and compared with those of domestic institutions, these figures can be seen to be better than first appears.

3. UK citizens' beliefs as to whether they and their country have benefited from the UK being a member of the European Union.

In the survey conducted in the spring of 2004, only 30% of the UK poll believed the country had benefited from EU membership. In just six months, this figure has risen by a third to reach 39%.

Over the same period, the 'don't know' figure has fallen from 23% to 16%.

When it is noted that the 'no' vote has fallen from 47% to 45% - a significant but small move - it is obvious that the greater part of the increase in this positive view is generated by citizens who previously had no opinion on the issue.

What is also important to notice is that the female figure increased by a greater percentage than that of males from 24% to 35%.

Young people (aged 15 to 24) and the best educated produced high positive readings concerning the benefits of EU membership of 50% and 61% respectively.

The general but telling question which asked whether the UK's membership of the Union was a good thing also brings up some very positive results.

Between the spring and autumn of 2004, the UK 'don't know' factor halved from 13% to 6% and, over the same period, the percentage of UK citizens seeing membership as a good thing rose from 29% to 38%, while the figures for those believing it to be a bad thing fell from 29% to 22%.

The percentage of the UK poll for whom the EU conjured up a positive image has increased from one in four (26%) to nearly one in three (32%).

Particularly strong support (42%) for this concept was seen amongst 15 to 24 year olds, while more than half (52%) of those who were the most educated held the same opinion.

The future and important issues

EU25 citizens are asked broad questions on what they anticipate being the way the world will be over the next twelve months.

Across the European Union, 50% of those questioned believe their **life in general** would be the same over the next twelve months and 35% believe it would be better – up slightly from the 32% holding this view six months previously.

UK citizens are noticeably more optimistic about the future with 44% believing their life would be better.

Immigration is the most important issue facing UK citizens in the autumn of 2004 and was cited by 29% of the poll, the highest figure recorded for this issue anywhere in the European Union. However, this figure is substantially lower than the 41% noted in the spring 2004.

Across the Union, immigration is only ranked sixth.

Terrorism was rated the second most important issue in the UK and has steadily moved up from fourth rank in autumn 2003 and third in spring 2004.

Crime, which was the second most important issue six months previously, moves into third place in the UK ranking. Terrorism and crime are ranked fourth and third in the EU25 statistics.

In equal fourth place were the **healthcare system** together with **pensions**.

The **education system** was the issue rated sixth most important by the UK poll.

Neither unemployment nor the **economic situation** appear to be of much concern to UK citizens and are in equal seventh position.

Unemployment is, however, ranked the most important issue according to the EU25 average at 46% with figures of 75% in Germany, while the economic situation was listed in second place in this table.

Media sources, volume level and attitudes

When media sources relating to the European Union were evaluated, **television**, once again, emerged as the most popular source of information, being cited by 71% of all EU25 citizens – a figure showing a slight decrease from the 73% noted in spring 2004.

In the UK, **television** was a source of information for 62% of men as opposed to 56% of women and was more frequently used by the oldest section of the poll (64%) than the youngest (46%).

The medium was now more used by the least educated (64%) as opposed to 57% amongst the most educated. This is a surprising reversal of the situation six months before where the medium was used by 73% of the most educated compared with 58% of those who had left school aged 15 or younger.

Daily newspapers were one of the sources chosen by virtually half (49%) of EU25 citizens – a fall from the 54% figure recorded in spring 2004.

The UK figures at 47% showed a small decline from the 50% in the previous Eurobarometer survey.

In the UK, 51% of men and 43% of women used this medium, and usage increased by age from 36% amongst the youngest group to 50% amongst those aged 55 or more.

There was also a noticeable variation in the UK figures relating to occupation with 57% of managers using them as an information source on the EU compared with just 26% of students.

In both the European Union and the UK, the third most popular source of information on the EU, which was selected by a third (34%) of EU25 and 29% of UK citizens, was **radio** – both figures showing a marginal decrease over the past six months.

Across the EU25, **discussions with relatives, friends and colleagues** remained the fourth most popular source of information with 23% of EU25 citizens taking part in this. This figure shows a slight decrease from the 25% recorded in the previous survey. In Sweden, this figure rises to 43%, while in Portugal it was just 12%. The UK figure was relatively low at 19%.

In the UK sample, 33% of the most educated used these discussions to gain information on the EU compared with just 19% of those who had left school aged 15 or less.

Across the EU25, the fifth most widely cited information source on the EU was **other newspapers and magazines**. This was a source given by 22% of those polled. A figure of 14% was observed in the UK.

The **Internet** is the sixth most cited information source across the European Union with one in five citizens (21%) citing this relatively new medium as one of their preferred sources.

Of the six media sources, the numbers of EU25 and UK citizens choosing them has fallen over the past six months with the exception of the Internet.

This medium has shown a growth from 16% to 21% across the 25 countries of the Union and in the country where it is most popular (the Netherlands), the figure has risen in just six months from 29% to 42%. In the UK, there has also been a substantial growth in this information source from 19% to 26%.

It would seem that the rapid growth of Internet usage across the whole European Union could make the medium one of the most popular sources of information in the future.

Across the EU25, nearly half the poll (46%) believes that the media **talk about the right amount** about the European Union. However, there is still a substantial number of citizens (38%) who believe that the media **talk too little** compared with just 11% who take the contrary view.

Media starvation on this issue is cited by 54% of Greeks while, at the other end of the spectrum, 21% of UK and Maltese citizens feel that there is **too much** media coverage.

A major result from this survey is that, compared with just 14% of the European Union who consider that the EU is presented **too negatively**, the UK figure is more than twice this average at 33% - an increase from the 27% seen six months previously.

This would imply a thawing of attitude in the UK towards the European Union and a possible distaste by a third of the UK public as to the way information on the European Union is presented by the media.

While there is an eleven percentage point difference between the 44% of EU25 citizens and the 33% of UK citizens who see media reporting on the EU as being **objective**, these are both substantial percentages.

Conversely, while only 14% across the EU25 see the media view as being **too negative**, this figure more than doubles to 33% in the UK.

While 44% of EU25 citizens believe that the EU is presented **objectively** with a high figure of 64% in Belgium, this figure falls to just 33% in the UK.

UK attitudes to the European Union and EU policies

Across the European Union, more than half of those polled (56%) felt that their country's membership of the European Union was a **good** thing and this figure rises to 85% in Luxembourg.

In the UK, while the comparable figure is just 38%, compared with the 56% EU25 average and is behind other low figures such as 46% for Austria, 45% for the Czech Republic and Malta and 40% for Latvia, there has still been an important increase in pro-EU feeling.

While six months previously an equal number of people (29%) believed the UK's membership of the European Union was either a **good** or a **bad** thing, the latest figures show that 38% believe it is a good thing compared with just 22% taking the negative view.

This is a major and significant shift in UK public opinion and it will be interesting to see if it continues to develop in future surveys.

Across the EU, more than half (53%) of those polled believed that their country had **benefited** from being a member of the European Union.

However, this average figure conceals substantial country-by-country variations ranging from 87% in Ireland to 36% in Sweden.

The number of UK citizens who believe that their country has **benefited** from EU membership has risen by nearly a third over just six months from 30% to 39%. Making up this number were 44% of the male poll and 35% of the female – this latter figure showing a substantial rise from 24% in the previous poll.

A halving of the UK 'don't know' factor from 23% to 10%, brought the number of UK citizens believing European foreign policy should be independent of that of the United States up to 76% - not far short of the EU25 average of 82%.

There was a noticeable difference based on education levels in the UK with 70% of the least educated compared with 88% of the most educated tending to agree with this statement.

When looking at UK respondents' occupation, even greater differences were observed. For example, 91% of managers agreed with this statement compared with just 59% of the unemployed.

UK citizens: in whom do they trust?

The level of trust that UK citizens have in their **press** is startlingly low at 14% - itself a fall of nearly a third from the 20% recorded in spring 2004. This figure is a third of the EU25 average of 42%.

The UK poll is definite in its lack of trust in the press and the 'don't know' factor at 4% is one of the lowest of all these fifteen instances.

The 'don't trust' figure in the UK therefore emerges at 82% - more than four out of five citizens having this view of the press.

Across the Union, more than three-quarters of those polled did not trust **political parties** and this produces figures of 77% for the EU25, 78% for the UK.

Despite a noticeable increase in the UK trust factor from 19% to 32%, virtually two-thirds (64%) of those polled in the UK did not trust the **national government**. This figure is, however, only four percentage points greater than the 60% average across the EU25.

A key finding of EB62 relates to the very substantial change of attitude amongst UK citizens regarding their trust in the **European Union**.

The first significant point is that the 'don't know' factor has fallen noticeably from 26% to 18% and, at the same time, the 'don't trust' factor has also dropped from 55% to 47%.

The combined effect of these two shifts is that the percentage of UK citizens trusting the European Union rises from just one in five (19%) to more than one in three (35%).

Although this 'trust' figure is still below the 50% average amongst EU25 Member States and well below the 68% from an enthusiastic Lithuania, it still shows a major change in attitude among UK citizens.

Delving more deeply into the UK figures to see which groups are driving this change in attitude, it is noted that, amongst the 35% trusting the European Union, are 38% of the male poll as opposed to 32% of women.

Younger people were also more prone to trust the EU, as is shown by the fact that this average figure is made up of 57% of those aged 15-24 compared with less than half of this number (25%) of those aged 55% or more.

Education was also a highly important factor in relation to this issue, with 45% of those educated to age 20 or beyond trusting the Union compared with just 25% amongst those educated to age 15 or less.

Although 41% of the UK poll still does not trust the **European Parliament**, compared with an EU25 average of 26%, it should be noted that, in EB62, the UK 'don't know' factor has fallen from 27% to 20% and the trust factor has risen sharply by a third from 30% to 39% compared with an EU25 average of 57

In the spring of 2004, the largest proportion (39%) of the UK poll did not trust the **European Commission** and more than a third (35%) had no opinion on this matter.

Just six months later, the situation had radically changed in that, in addition to the 'don't know' quotient falling by eight percentage points to 27%, the 'don't trust' figure had also fallen with the ensuing result that the largest proportion of the UK poll numbering 39% now stated that they trusted the European Commission. This compares with a figure of just 26% six months previously.

Although this figure of 39% is still considerably less than the EU25 average of 52%, there has been a substantial move in a positive direction.

Noticeably more men (44%) than women (34%) tended to trust the European Commission.

Trust levels changed with age so that while trust in the European Commission moved in a narrow band between 42% and 44% for those aged 15 to 54, there was a noticeable falling off to 34% for UK citizens aged 55 or more.

Education was a significant factor in this area with 48% of the most educated tending to trust the Commission compared with just 34% of those who had left school aged 15 or younger.

While 51% of managers and 56% of students trusted the European Commission, this figure falls to only 26% of house persons and 29% of the retired.

A high proportion (43%) of house persons did not express an opinion on this matter and relatively high figures of 33% were also noted amongst females and the self-employed.

When the trust question is asked in this instance in relation to the **Council of Ministers**, it is being posed to a group of people of whom 54% had not heard of the institution in question.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that very high 'don't know' figures (36% are recorded) and, by the same token, it is perhaps normal that people would not express trust in an organisation that they have never heard of.

Accordingly, 38% of the UK poll said that they did not trust the Council of Ministers compared with 29% across the EU25.

The UK figures show a substantial increase in the number of people trusting the **European Court of Justice** from 34% to 51% in just six months and this figure is relatively close to EU25 average of 57%.

Another noteworthy figure in this part of the survey is that the UK 'don't know' factor tumbles from 35% to 23% - virtually identical to the 22% average recorded across the EU25.